



HER STORIES: LIVES OF WOMEN IN THE DETROIT RIVER REGION

A BOOKLET BASED ON THE EXHIBITION AT
THE FRANÇOIS BABY HOUSE: WINDSOR'S
COMMUNITY MUSEUM

The completion of this exhibition required the combined efforts of many people, including that of the researcher, Beverly Boutilier, the staff of the François Baby House: Laurence Grant, Madelyn Della Valle, Judy Levesque, Hugh Barrett, Jennifer Healey, as well as the community advisory committee: Elise Davis, Sharon George, Nicole Germain, Janet Greene-Potomski, Heather Majaury, Christina Simmons. This committee provided representation from various community perspectives and was a valuable part of the exhibition development process. The Museum also gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Ministry of Culture and Communications through the "Reflections '92" program in the realization of this exhibition and the ongoing support of the City of Windsor and the Windsor Public Library Board. This booklet was edited by Madelyn Della Valle.

The history of women is a relatively recent field of study. In the late 1960s and 1970s, a new generation of women historians began to question women's exclusion from the historical record. Believing that "history" should be more than a chronicle of wars and politics, these historians began the slow process of reclaiming women's past. What they have found is both astonishing and exciting. Family and personal papers found in archives and attics across the country and around the world reveal that women have a richly textured past that is at once different from and connected to the history of men. Previously "anonymous women" now have names, and their experiences are now a part of history.

But the history of women is not yet complete, nor is it likely ever to be. Records have been lost, or, believing that the thoughts and activities of women were unimportant, they were never made. Nor is there only one woman's story to be told. What it means to be a "woman" changes from generation to generation, from culture to culture, and from society to society. And, although women as a group share the experience of gender, they are divided by the equally significant experiences of race, ethnicity, class and sexuality.

Like a large, complex quilt, then, the blocks of women's history can be sewn in many colors and arranged in many patterns. The variations of texture and cloth are as diverse as women themselves. This is particularly true of the history of women in the Detroit River region. Women of many nations and cultural traditions have lived and worked and died here. But many of their stories survive only as remnants and scraps of past lives.

Her Stories pieces together the lives of eleven women who lived or travelled through the Detroit River region in the 18th and 19th centuries. Unfortunately, some of these women did not leave behind any records of their own making. Like so many other women from the past, some of their stories must be told using scraps and pieces of the better known histories recounted by men.

The stories of these eleven women do not represent the experience of all women in the Detroit River region. These are their stories alone, not "the story" of the cultural communities of which they were a part. Every woman has a past, and there are many more stories to be told.

RESIDENTS: GROWING UP & GROWING OLD IN THE DETROIT RIVER REGION

The Detroit River region was originally known as Bkejwanong. The ancestors of the Walpole Island First Nation have long occupied and used Bkejwanong - their Territory. The Walpole Island First Nation is comprised of the Council of Three Fires, the Ojibwa, Potawatomi and Ottawa Nations. The Aboriginal title and rights of the Walpole Island First Nation to its Territory were affirmed and protected as part of the "Indian Territory" by the Royal Proclamation of 1763.

During the 18th century, French traders and colonists, along with numerous Black slaves, established Detroit as a western outpost along the St. Lawrence fur trade route. After the British victory over most of New France in 1759-60, the Detroit River region became part of British North America. It should be noted that this was not a conquest of Bkejwanong or other First Nation territories. Britain ceded Fort Detroit to the United States in 1796, but, because of the strategic importance of the region, it quickly re-established its military forces at Fort Malden in Amherstburg.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, peoples of Native, African, French, British, and American ancestry resided in the Detroit River region and contributed to the region's fur trading and agricultural economy. Not all peoples shared equally in the wealth of the region, however. Whole Native societies were dispossessed of their lands by European and North American governments in the 18th and 19th centuries. And, until the British Imperial parliament formally abolished slavery in 1833, Blacks could still be legally enslaved in Upper Canada - although the practice of slavery in the colony slowly abated after 1800.

Historians of the Detroit River region have usually portrayed the fur trade, the military, and agriculture as exclusively male ventures. But, as these four portraits of women residents of the Detroit River region show, women participated in all of these activities.

Suzanne Baby, Catherine Reynolds, Mary McKee, and Susan Banks were all well known to the people of their respective communities. But they are less well known to us. Their stories have survived largely as the residue of the better-known histories of men. But, when examined with care, this residue can help us reclaim their lives as integral and important parts of our history.

These are their stories.

SUZANNE RÉAUME BABY - HER STORY

Suzanne Réaume Baby was born in Detroit on 12 September 1740, the second surviving child of Pierre Réaume of Lachine, Canada and Suzanne Hubert dit Lacroix of Detroit. In 1760, the same year that France surrendered Detroit and its other North American territories to Great Britain, Suzanne married Jacques Dupéron Baby, the son of a prominent Montreal fur trading family.

Like the Loyalist women who followed their husbands northward in the 1780s, Suzanne experienced the impact of war directly. Dupéron refused to swear an oath of allegiance to George III and was briefly incarcerated at Fort Detroit. After his release in 1761, the young couple decided to leave Detroit and resettle in France. While wintering in Montreal, however, Suzanne and Dupéron discovered that the Montreal fur market remained good. They thus determined to reconcile themselves to the new regime and returned to Detroit in 1762.

Although neither Suzanne nor Dupéron brought any real property to their union in 1760, by the mid-1780s they owned a considerable amount of land on both sides of the Detroit River. Their wealth was largely accumulated through fur trading, milling, and retail selling. But they also farmed, using the labour of 30 Black slaves to maintain a plantation-style farm.

Suzanne undoubtedly contributed to the management of the family business and lands. But clearly her adult life was dominated by childbearing and child rearing. Between 1760 and 1789, Suzanne gave birth to 22 children. Only half this number survived infancy.

When Dupéron died in August of 1789, Suzanne was 49 years old and still had three children under ten years of age to raise. Dupéron had made his will in 1786. The bulk of the considerable Baby estate was left to Suzanne. As la Dame veuve Baby (the widow Baby), Suzanne gained a great deal of personal authority, and for the first time since her marriage she once again had a legal identity of her own.

In 1796, Suzanne and her youngest children moved to Quebec. At Suzanne's request, her eldest son took charge of the Baby business interests at Detroit.

Suzanne retained absolute authority over the entire estate until 1800, when, at the age of 60, she decided to settle estates on each of her eleven surviving children.

Suzanne's exact date of death is not known.

The Childbearing Career of Suzanne Réaume Baby, 1760 - 1789

Between 1760, when she married, and 1789, when Duperon Baby died, Suzanne Baby gave birth to 22 children. Of this number, only 4 girls and 7 boys survived.

Such high fertility and mortality rates were not uncommon in the 18th century. It is still remarkable, however, that Suzanne herself survived such a long and extremely tragic childbearing career.

If we assume that Suzanne's childbearing years were restricted to the 29 years of her marriage, this means that, on average, she gave birth once every 16 months for nearly three decades. Furthermore, it also means that she was pregnant for more than 16 years of her life.

Her surviving children were as follows:

1763	Jacques
1767	Thérèse
1768	François
1770	Jean Baptiste
1774	Archange
1776	Pierre
1777	Monique
1778	Daniel
1779	Antoine
1781	Louis
1786	Suzanne

Suzanne Réaume Baby

Primary sources:

Archives of Ontario

“Statement of Account by Alexis Langlois, 1798-1801”. Hiram Walker Historical Museum Collection, Baby Family Papers.

Archives Judiciaires de Québec

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CATHERINE REYNOLDS - HER STORY

Catherine Reynolds was born in Detroit sometime around 1782. The Detroit census of that year indicates that two daughters resided in the household of Thomas Reynolds, the Assistant Commissary Officer for the British forces at Fort Detroit. It is presumed that Catherine was one of them.

Catherine grew up in a privileged household. Her father had extensive land holdings in Essex and Kent counties, and during the 1780s, the Reynolds family owned at least one Black slave. When Detroit was ceded to the Americans in 1796, the family moved across the River to Amherstburg where Thomas Reynolds continued his military career at Fort Malden.

As one of a small number of women in a military town, Catherine would have been an eligible "maiden". But, like many other North American women in this period, Catherine chose not to marry. She was not alone in this choice. In the early 19th century, increasing numbers of well-to-do women chose to lead what was known as a life of "single blessedness" in order to develop their own special talents and abilities.

This decision, more than any other, shaped the texture of Catherine's adult life.

Catherine's special talent was drawing and painting. Only two dozen or so drawings and paintings executed by her have survived. In her paintings of local scenes Catherine imposed the orderly and restrained lines of the European Neoclassical style on her Canadian surroundings. This is clearly illustrated in "Fort Malden and Amherstburg in 1812 as seen from Elliot's Point".

Her meticulous copies of British and European scenes also reveal her sympathy with European artistic conventions.

While her father lived, Catherine resided at home in Amherstburg. Upon his death in 1810, Catherine, now a confirmed "spinster", attached herself to the household of her brother, Robert.

Sometime between 1816 and 1819, a legacy enabled Robert and his wife, Thérèse Bouchette des Rivières, to build "Belle Vue", a substantial red brick Georgian mansion outside of Amherstburg. It is generally believed that Catherine helped design "Belle Vue". She may also have executed many of its woodcarvings.

Catherine died in 1864.



Copy of daguerreotype of Catherine Reynolds, about 1850. François Baby House, P5141.

Catherine Reynolds

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MARY MCKEE - HER STORY

Mary McKee, a Wyandot woman, was born in Michigan, in 1838. Her great-grandfather, Alexander McKee, and her grandfather, Thomas McKee, were prominent members of the Indian Department at Detroit and Amherstburg in the 1790s and early 1800s. These illustrious male ancestors usually dominate any telling of Mary's story. But women play a very important role in Aboriginal societies. In the Wyandot Nation, questions affecting the interests of the whole Nation were determined by it in general convention, and men and women alike were heard, and voted. Additionally, many Native societies trace their line of descent through women, not men.

Mary's great-grandmother appears in most historical accounts only as "a Shawnee woman" living on the Sciota River (Ohio). In the late 1770s she moved with her Loyalist husband, Alexander McKee, and baby son Thomas to Detroit. Here Alexander rose to prominence in the Indian Department. As deputy inspector of Indian affairs at Detroit during the 1790s, he orchestrated many of the Native land "surrenders" in the Detroit River region.

Mary's grandmother, Charlotte Brown, was a Wyandot woman. Little more than her name is known about her, however. With Thomas McKee she had three children - although his "official" marriage to Thérèse Askin in 1797 is usually accorded prominence in accounts of his life. Charlotte is mentioned only as the "unknown mother" of McKee's progeny. One of Charlotte's children was Mary's father, Thomas McKee, Jr.

Mary's mother was Catherine 'Kitty' Couc, the daughter of a Wyandot chief. Her Wyandot name was Kyuhkwe (sometimes spelled Kye-Kwe). She married Thomas, Jr. in the mid 1830s. Unlike her husband's family, Catherine did not embrace European conventions or use a European language - she spoke only Wyandot. Mary was the only child of this marriage, although both Catherine and Thomas, Jr. had children from other marriages.

In 1843, Mary and her mother moved from their home in Michigan and went to the Kansas Indian Territory. This was a result of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which was passed to induce Native people to move west of the Mississippi in order to make room for more White settlement. In 1845 they came back to this area and settled on the Anderdon Reserve. Mary left Anderdon about 1854 and lived with her Aunt Mary Walker in Kansas for at least 13 years after which she returned to the Anderdon band in 1874.

At the turn of the century, Mary told some of the Wyandot stories and myths that she had heard as a child growing up in the Detroit River region to federal researchers. Thus a written record of the memories she shared with them has been preserved.

Mary moved to the Oklahoma Indian Territory in 1918 and died in 1922.



Photograph of Mary McKee with her tools, 1911, aged 73

Mary McKee posed with the tools used by Wyandot women for food preparation. These included a log mortar and wooden pestle, and various carved and bark containers.

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Mary McKee

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SUSAN SIMPSON BANKS - HER STORY

Susan Simpson was born in North Colchester Township, Canada West on 9 March 1845. Her father, Levi Simpson, was a Black man originally from the United States and her mother, Elizabeth Hutchins Simpson, was a White woman from Wales.

In March 1862, when she was 17 years old, Susan married Anthony Banks, a young man of 22 from Colchester Township South. Although the Banks family came from Virginia, Anthony's paternal ancestors had never been enslaved. Anthony's mother Esther Malawice Banks, was the daughter of General Isaac Brock and his Black Upper Canadian cook.

During the first 20 years of their married life, Susan and Anthony lived with Esther Banks in her one storey log cabin home in Colchester Township. In the mid-1880s, Susan and Anthony finally built their own two storey wood frame house on a 54 acre farm in South Colchester. By that time, Anthony had been appointed a constable for the County of Essex - the first Black man to hold such a position in Canada.

By the time Susan and Anthony moved to their new home, Susan had given birth to 10 of her 14 children. Her last child was born in 1891 when she was 46 years old. Thus, like Suzanne Baby, Susan Banks experience wifehood as a long succession of pregnancy, childbirth, and child care. But their burdens differed: Susan Banks was a Black woman of moderate means, while Suzanne Baby was a well-to-do woman who owned slaves.

Although the health of many rural women was ruined by the physical demands of motherhood, rural families like the banks relied upon the labour of their children to survive. While their 9 sons helped Anthony work the land and tend the cattle, their 5 daughters shared Susan's labour in the house, in the garden, and in the farm yard.

The labour of Susan and her daughters was crucial to the family's survival. They grew vegetables, harvested fruit from the orchard, fed the chickens and gathered their eggs, and kept dairy cows for milk and butter. This work fed the family. In addition, Susan occasionally cared for prisoners detained by Anthony in their home. But this was the exception. Most of Susan's time was consumed by backbreaking housework. The help of her growing daughters must have been a great source of relief for the often pregnant Susan.

After several bouts of illness, Susan died of pneumonia in 1909.



Susan Simpson Banks. Courtesy of/ Courtoisie d' Alberta Mason, Detroit, Michigan.

Susan Simpson Banks

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MIGRANTS & MISSIONARIES WOMEN ON THE MOVE

The population of North America was a highly mobile one in the 18th and 19th centuries. Borders were crossed and re-crossed, often several times in one life. War and oppression also resulted in the wholesale migration of peoples during this period. American Loyalists, some with Black slaves, migrated northward to the colonies of British North America after the American War of Independence ended in 1783. Entire societies of Native peoples were forced from their lands by the relentless aggression of European settlement. And thousands of Black fugitives undertook the long and dangerous journey from slavery to freedom along the Underground Railroad in the early and mid 1800s.

The population of the Detroit River region was augmented at different times by each of these and other groups in the 19th century. Many individuals remained here to raise their families and to build communities, but a significant proportion did not. Some groups, including many Native peoples and Black refugees, were often made to feel unwelcome.

Women, as well as men, were among the numerous migrants who came to the Detroit River region. Like many Native peoples forced from their homes in this period, Sally Ainse moved to the region in search of economic opportunity, as well as justice for herself and her people. Other women, like Anne Murray Powell and Anne 'Nancy' Powell, accompanied a male relative to the region and left when he did. Both Mary Ann Shadd and Laura Haviland followed the well-worn tracks of the Underground Railway to the Windsor area, where each worked to further the twin causes of Black emancipation and the abolition of slavery.

These are their stories.

SALLY AINSE - HER STORY

Sarah or Sally Ainse, a woman of Oneida ancestry, was born somewhere in the Thirteen Colonies or in the territory to the west around 1728. Sally grew up on the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. When she was 17 years old, she married Andrew Montour, with whom she lived in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York state. Together they had several children, but, after falling on hard times, the couple split in the mid-1750s.

Sally moved to the Mohawk River and established herself as a fur trader. By the mid-1760s she was trading as far westward as the north shore of Lake Erie. When the American revolution began, Sally moved to Detroit where the census records of 1779 and 1782 indicate that she was a woman of some "property".

The account ledgers of Detroit merchants like William Macomb, John Askin, and Montague Tremblay indicate that Sally's trading activities were fairly extensive in the 1770s and 1780s. In 1780, Sally negotiated with the Chippewa for use of a property that extended from the mouth of the Thames to present-day Chatham. After selling her Detroit properties in May 1787, Sally relocated there.

In 1789, Sally addressed her first land petition to Lord Dorchester, Governor of the Province of Canada, asking him to recognize her land rights. Her claim was later substantiated by 7 Chippewa chiefs in 1791. They argued that their surrender of lands to the British in Essex and Kent counties had not included Sally's property. The Six Nations chief, Joseph Brant, also took up Sally's cause during the 1790s, as did the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe.

As a Native and a married woman, however, Sally ultimately had no property rights under British law. By 1800, most of her lands had been given to white settlers. Although she continued to petition the government until 1815, she was never awarded any compensation for her losses.

Much to the discomfort of British officials, Sally served as a courier for Brant during his 1794 negotiations with American chiefs for Native unity under a British flag. Although we know that Sally continued to trade in the Detroit River area well into the 19th century, after 1800, Sally's story becomes more obscure and her steps more difficult to trace.

It is believed that Sally died in Amherstburg around 1823. She would have been roughly 95 years of age.

are means of our prays to whom
Petitioners grant of the said land (as
your ex's don they think meet) according
Petitioners may enjoy the benefits of the h
I may be induced to continue the m
which she has already offer bought
paid, which has cost her so much
3 April 92. Sally A

Sally Ainse's signature and totemic mark in Petition from Sally Ainse, 13 April 1792. While Aboriginal men often signed treaties, and other documents with totemic marks, it was unusual for a woman to do so. Courtesy of National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, RG 1, L 3, vol. 16, petition A Misc./23.

Sally Ainse

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ANNE MURRAY POWELL - HER STORY

Anne Murray was born in England on 26 April 1755. When Anne was 16 years old, her parents sent her to Boston where she lived with her aunt, Elizabeth Inman, a wealthy shop-keeper.

In October 1775, Anne eloped with William Dummer Powell, the Loyalist son of a prominent Boston merchant. Shortly after their union, Anne and William left revolutionary Boston and sailed for the comparative safety of England. Here William studied law and Anne began her family.

When Anne and William returned to North America around 1780 they settled in Montreal. Leaving England had been difficult for Anne, for she had to leave her two eldest children behind. In addition, because of the war between the Thirteen Colonies and Great Britain, she was unable to contact her beloved Aunt Elizabeth in Boston. The sudden death of one of her babies simply compounded her distress.

When the war ended, Anne and William returned to Massachusetts. But they soon found that Loyalists were not welcome there and returned to Montreal. This time Anne had all of her children with her. Her dear friend Nancy - who was William's sister - had also joined them from England. With her children around her and a close female companion at hand Anne's four years in Montreal were happy ones.

In 1789, William was appointed judge of the newly created District of Hesse at Detroit. Along with their 5 children and Nancy, Anne and William set out for Detroit in May of 1789. The trip was a difficult one for Anne whose most recent baby had been born only a few weeks before their departure.

After several hot weeks at Fort Detroit, the family moved across the river to Petite Côte, near Sandwich. But Anne and William did not remain in the region for long. Anne's life was threatened by local land owners who resented William's interference in their affairs. Fearing for their safety, Anne, Nancy and the children left Detroit in 1791. William followed them soon afterward.

After a brief interlude in England, Anne and William returned to Detroit in 1793. In 1794, they moved to Niagara where Anne befriended Elizabeth Simcoe. Finally, in 1798, they moved to York (Toronto) where William became Attorney General of Upper Canada in 1816.

Anne remained in York until her death in 1849 at the age of 94. She was survived by only two of her nine children.

Nancy joined Anne and William at the beginning of their second residency in Montreal. Four years later, when William moved Anne and their children to Detroit, Nancy accompanied them.

Although Anne Powell's observations about Detroit are not known, Nancy kept a diary of their journey from Montreal to Detroit.

After leaving Detroit, Nancy married Isaac Winslow Clark, the son of a prominent Boston loyalist. The union did not last long: Nancy died in 1792 at Montreal.

Detroit in 1789

The Fort lies about half way up the River, which is 18 Miles in length. In drawing the lines between the British and American possessions the Fort was left within their lines. A new Town is now to be built on the other side of the river where the Courts are held, and where my Brother must of course reside.

The heat of Detroit, 1789

As soon as our vessell anchored several gentlemen came on board; they had agreed upon a House for us, till my Brother could meet with one that would suit him. So we found ourselves at home immediately. We were several weeks at the Fort which gave us an opportunity of making a little acquaintance with the inhabitants. The ladies visited us in full dress tho' the weather was boiling hot. What do you think of walking about when the Thermometer is above 90? It was as high as 96 the morning we were returning our visits. Mrs. P & I spent the chief part of our time in our chamber with no other covering than a slip & under petticoat.

Anne Murray Powell

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MARY SHADD CARY - HER STORY

Mary Ann Shadd was born on 9 October 1823 to a family of free Black abolitionists living in the slave state of Delaware. In 1833, the Shadd family moved to West Chester, Pennsylvania where Mary attended a Quaker school for Black children. After completing her own studies in 1839, Mary became a teacher at the age of 16. For the next decade, she established or taught in schools for Black children in several free and slave states.

When the United States Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, Mary migrated northward to Canada West to escape the threat of unlawful enslavement. In 1851, she settled in Windsor and opened a school for Black refugees. Mary described Windsor as a hostile and segregated place. "This is by universal consent," she wrote, "the most destitute community of colored people, known in this province."

During the 1850s, Mary was one of the most outspoken anti-slavery activists in Canada West. She felt strongly that "caste" or segregated institutions were inappropriate in a free country and only contributed to racial discrimination. Mary believed that integration was the surest route to "race improvement" for Canadian Blacks. To promote these views, Mary helped found the Provincial Freeman, a weekly newspaper for the Black community of Canada West that began publication in 1853. Although listed on the masthead as "M. A. Shadd, Publishing Agent," in reality Mary was the editor of the paper.

In 1854 Mary decided to correct the "misapprehension" that M. A. Shadd was a man. It was, she wrote, "a mistake occasioned, no doubt, by the habit we have of using initials...we would simply correct, for the future, our error, by giving here the name in full, (Mary A. Shadd) as we do not like the Mr. and Esq., by which we are so often addressed". This revelation unleashed a wave of "sex discrimination" that threatened to close the Provincial Freeman. Mary urged readers not to abandon their support of the paper simply because it had "Editors of the unfortunate sex". After advising readers that a new "gentleman Editor" had been secured for the paper, Mary said "Adieu" to Freeman readers.

In the late 1850s, Mary married Thomas F. Cary of Toronto and resumed her teaching career in Chatham. During the American Civil War, she returned to the United States where she recruited Black soldiers for the Union army. After the war, Mary (now a widow) moved to Washington, D.C. where she taught school for many years, worked for the welfare of emancipated Blacks, and studied law at Howard University (she graduated in 1883 at the age of 60). Mary Shadd died of cancer in 1893. She was 70 years old.

Mary Ann Shadd's Farewell, August 1855

In taking leave of our readers, at this time, we do so for the best interest of the enterprise, and with the hope that our absence will be their gain. We want the Freeman to prosper, and shall labor to that end. When it was not, but was said to be needed, we travelled to arouse a sentiment in favor of it, and from then until now, have worked for it, how well others must say, but, through difficulties, and opposed to obstacles such as we feel confident few, if any, females have had to contend against in the same business, except the sister who shared our labors for awhile; and now after such a familiar acquaintanceship with difficulties, of many shapes, in trying with a few others to keep it alive for one year, as at first promised, we present it in its second year, afresh to the patronage of friends to truth and justice, and its Editor, the Rev. Wm. P. Newman, to their kind consideration. To its enemies, we would say, be less captious to him than to us; be more considerate, if you will; it is fit that you should deport your ugliest to a woman. To colored women, we have a word--we have 'broken the Editorial ice,' whether willing or not, for your class in America; so go to Editing, as many of you as are willing, and able, and as soon as you may, if you think you are ready; and to those of you who will not, we say, help us when we visit you, to make brother Newman's burden lighter, by subscribing to the paper, paying for it, and getting your neighbours to do the same.

Mary Ann Shadd, "Adieu," Provincial Freeman, 22 August 1855

"WHY WOMAN WAS MADE OF A RIB," 1854

A young lady having asked a surgeon why woman was made from the rib of a man in preference to any other bone, her gave the following gallant answer:-- "She was not taken from the head, lest she should rule over him; nor from his feet, lest he should trample upon her; but she was taken from his side, that she might be his equal; from under his arm that he might protect her; from near his heart, that he might cherish and love her.

Provincial Freeman, vol. 1, no. 35 (18 November 1854)

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LAURA SMITH HAVILAND - HER STORY

Laura Smith was born in Leeds County, Upper Canada, on 20 December 1808. In 1815, the family resettled in New York state where Laura was educated at a Quaker school. Although her parents were prominent members of the local Society of Friends, as a young girl Laura secretly embraced the frontier revivalism and evangelical spirit of the Methodist church.

In 1825, Laura married Charles Haviland, Jr., a Quaker who shared Laura's fervent religious convictions. In 1829, Laura and Charles, along with members of their extended families, migrated westward to establish a Quaker settlement in Lenawee County, Michigan Territory. By 1845 Laura had given birth to eight children. But her work was not restricted to the welfare of her own family. Laura helped to found the first antislavery society in Michigan, opened a manual education school for orphans on her farm, and frequently offered refuge to Blacks travelling northward on the Underground Railroad. By 1844, Laura was also a minister of the Methodist Wesleyan Church.

In 1845, Laura's life was radically transformed by the tragic deaths of her husband, her parents, a sister, and her youngest child from an epidemic. From that point until the end of the American Civil War, Laura devoted her life to the cause of antislavery, publicly denouncing the institution of slavery and working for many years as "a conductor" on the Underground Railroad to Canada West.

In 1852, Laura lived briefly in Canada West, teaching Black children and adults to read in a school at Puce River near Windsor. Laura also helped the community found a union church of Methodists and Baptists. The church thrived for a time, but when Laura left the community, attendance declined and several denominational churches were established in its stead.

During the American Civil War Laura worked in northern army hospitals and prison camps, and offered religious instruction to refugee Blacks. In 1864 she became a paid agent for the Michigan Freedman's Aid Commission, and travelled widely on its behalf throughout the southern United States. After the war ended, Laura continued her activism on behalf of freed Blacks and orphaned children. In her later years she also embraced the causes of temperance reform and women's suffrage. In 1872 she returned to the Society of Friends, believing that its social outlook had become more progressive.

Laura Smith Haviland died in Grand Rapids, Michigan in April 1898. She is buried at the Friends' cemetery outside of Adrian, Michigan.



Laura Smith Haviland with slave irons. Laura is holding handcuffs and a knee stiffener. Under her foot is a rough iron collar worn by a slave as a torture device. Courtesy of Lenawee County Historical Museum, Adrian, Michigan.

Laura Haviland

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TRAVELLERS & TOURISTS VISITORS & NEAR VISITORS TO THE DETROIT RIVER REGION

In the 1790s, First Nations and people of European and African descent continued to interact in Detroit, which remained the most populous settlement on Lake Erie. Compared to the straggling Lake Ontario communities of Niagara and Toronto, Detroit was a virtual Upper Canadian metropolis. Although a number of new towns were established on the British side of the river after Detroit was ceded to the Americans in 1796, none could rival Detroit's size or economic stature. Not surprisingly, then, the principal destination of most visitors to the Detroit River region in the 18th and 19th centuries was Detroit itself.

Women were eager travellers in the 18th and 19th centuries, but were not always able to go where they wanted. Even an upper-class woman like Elizabeth Simcoe had her ambition to visit Detroit thwarted on several occasions, first by pregnancy and then by the threat of war.

Lydia Bacon, on the other hand, visited both Fort Detroit and Fort Malden in 1812. Her stay was not an entirely pleasant one, however. During her visit she was bombarded by British cannon for days at end, was a witness to the American surrender of Fort Detroit, and was twice made a prisoner of war by the British.

Detroit was a far more tranquil place when Anna Jameson journeyed there in 1837. Passing through the British side of the river on her way to the great city Jameson could not help but wonder why Great Britain had bargained so badly in 1796.

These are their stories.

ELIZABETH POSTHUMA GWILLIM SIMCOE - HER STORY

Elizabeth Posthuma Gwillim was born in 1762 to a well-to-do family in Whitchurch, Herefordshire, England. In 1782 she married John Graves Simcoe, a veteran of the American War of Independence. Simcoe was eager to establish himself in a government career and used Elizabeth's considerable wealth to realize his aspirations.

Simcoe's appointment as Lieutenant Governor of the newly created province of Upper Canada in 1790 split the family for several years. Elizabeth and Simcoe left their four eldest children at home in England. Only their two youngest children, a girl aged 2 years and a boy aged 3 months, travelled with them to North America.

Elizabeth and Simcoe spent their first seven months in North America at Quebec. Here, Elizabeth became good friends with Madame Baby, the sister-in-law of Suzanne baby of Detroit. Elizabeth enjoyed Quebec society, and expressed here desire to visit Detroit, which, like Quebec, was reputed to have a lively winter social season.

Elizabeth had planned to accompany Simcoe on his first official visit to Detroit in 1793. But the timing of the journey was not good. Only a few weeks prior to Simcoe's February departure Elizabeth had given birth to a baby daughter named Katherine. As a result, she remained at home in the relative comfort of her winterized tent.

Elizabeth planned to visit Detroit in 1794, but circumstances again intervened. Alarmed by the growing threat of hostilities between Britain and the United States, Simcoe hurried westward to supervise the construction of a fort on the Miami (Maumee) River south of Detroit. The possibility that Detroit might soon be a theatre of war dampened Elizabeth's enthusiasm for the journey.

By the early autumn of 1794 war fever again gripped the small British colony of Upper Canada. War with the Americans seemed imminent. Once again Simcoe set out for Detroit and once again Elizabeth was not with him. Fearing that Niagara might also be attacked, in September she left by boat for Quebec the same day that Simcoe departed Niagara for Detroit.

Elizabeth returned to Niagara in the spring of 1795. During her last year in Niagara she met and even drew many residents of Detroit, but she was never able to visit the settlement before her return to England in 1796.

Elizabeth Simcoe to Mrs. Hunt, May 1794

Elizabeth faced a crisis of another kind while Simcoe was away. Her baby daughter Katherine, barely a year old, died on 19 April 1774. The event is not recorded in her diary. Not until Simcoe had returned from Detroit in early May did Elizabeth write to her family about her loss.

It is with pain I take up my pen to inform you of the loss we have sustained & the melancholy event of our losing our poor little Katherine, one of the strongest healthiest children you ever saw... She had been feverish one or two days cutting teeth, which not being an unusual case with children I was not much alarmed. On good Friday she was playing in my room in the morning, in the afternoon was seized with fits. I sat up the whole night the greater part of which she continued to have spasms & before seven in the morning she was no more... She was the sweetest tempered pretty child imaginable, just beginning to talk & walk & the suddenness of the event you may be sure shocked me inexpressibly.

Quoted in Mary Beacock Fryer, *Elizabeth Posthuma Simcoe: A Biography* (Toronto, 1989), pp. 93-94

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LYDIA STETSON BACON - HER STORY

As the stories of Suzanne Baby, Elizabeth Simcoe, Sally Ainse and Anne Murray Powell show, women are not immune from the ill effects of war. The story of Lydia Bacon, an American woman who visited Detroit in 1812, also shows us that war itself has never been an exclusively male experience.

Lydia Stetson was born in Boston in 1786. Sometime before 1811 Lydia married Lieutenant Josiah Bacon, a quartermaster of the Fourth Regiment of the United States Infantry. In that year, Josiah's regiment moved first to Pittsburgh and then to Indiana. After repressing Native resistance at Wabash, the regiment and its wives wintered at Vincennes. In May 1812, the regiment was ordered northward to Detroit where the outbreak of war with Great Britain was a daily expectation.

Lydia remained lighthearted about the prospect of going to Detroit, despite the threat of war. Lydia was not the only woman travelling with the Fourth Regiment. There were at least three other officers' wives in the party; several soldiers' wives also accompanied the troops. While Lydia and the other "ladies" rode on horseback, the wives of common soldiers made the journey from Indiana to Detroit on foot. Lydia felt sympathy for them, but seemed to accept such social divisions as a necessary feature of life.

In early July, the regiment reached the Maumee River. From here, several wounded soldiers and officers' wives embarked by boat for Fort Detroit. The boat was seized by the British 18 miles from Detroit and its occupants, including Lydia, were declared prisoners of war. After spending one night on a British prison ship, Lydia and the other officers' wives were permitted to proceed to Detroit under a flag of truce.

For several weeks, the American and British forces exchanged fire and raiding parties. By August 15th the women and children of the regiment had been moved inside the Fort. When the British siege of Fort Detroit began, Lydia initially watched from the main part of the Fort, witnessing first hand the incredibly destructive power of cannon fire. When the room reserved for the women was threatened, Lydia and her female companions sought refuge in a root house on the far side of the Fort.

After General Hull surrendered to the British forces, Lydia was taken prisoner once again and transported by schooner to Fort Erie. From here, she and her husband travelled by carriage to Niagara with General Hull. Because of Lydia's presence, Lieutenant Bacon was released and the couple returned home by cart as far as Buffalo and then by stage coach to Boston.

Lydia Bacon's account of the British Bombardment of Fort Detroit in
1812

August 19th

Amidst the horror of War I have not been able to compose myself sufficiently to write a line, but as the carnage has ceased with us for the present, & I with my Dear Husband & many others, are prisoners of war, seated very quietly in his Majesty's Ship the *Queen Charlotte*, I will now endeavour to give an account of some of the very interesting events which have transpired within these five days past. While the bearers of summons were returning with a negative to their demand, I took Mrs Hs oldest girl, a Child about three years old & went into the Fort which was some distance from our House, & I did not tarry by the way I assure you, but when I arrived I found many had got there before me. it was not long before the fireing of cannon commenced on both sids, & continued without effecting anything, till the enemy about midnight discontinued, & we ceased also, some of us females & Children had not been able to eat anything all day, & feeling very faint concluded to make some tea, this meal we might call an early breakfast as it was one in the Morning when we partooke of it, after this we endeavoured to get some sleep....

August 16th Soon as auroras beautiful rays adorned the east, the Cannon began to roar apparently with tenfold fury, to do execution, the enemys shot began to enter the Fort, & as some Ladies were making cylinders, (bags to hold the powder) & scraping lint in case it should be wanted, a 24 pound shot entered the next door to the one they were in, & cut two Officers who were standing in the entry directly in two their bowels gushing out, the same ball passed through the Wall into a room where a number of people were & took the legs of one man off & the flesh of the thigh of another the person who had his legs shot off died in a short time, thus one of these angry Messengers destroyed the lives of three & wounded a fourth in a moment of time,....

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Lydia Bacon

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ANNA BROWNELL MURPHY JAMESON - HER STORY

Anna Brownell Murphy was born in Dublin on 19 May 1794. Her father, Dennis Brownell Murphy, was a miniaturist and portrait painter who moved his family to the north of England in 1798 and then to London in 1806. With the death of her father's patron at court, the family's fortunes declined. In 1810 Anna began a career as a governess, serving in the households of several prominent and titled families. In 1825, Anna married Robert Sympson Jameson, a lawyer, with whom she had had a stormy relationship since 1821.

A year after her marriage, Anna's first travel book was published anonymously. Entitled *Diary of an ennuyé*, it launched Anna's long literary career. By 1829 the marriage of Anna and Robert was in difficulty. In that year, Robert sailed for Dominica to take up his appointment as chief justice of the colony. Anna remained in London where she continued to write. By 1832, she had produced three more books and established her reputation in Europe as well as North America.

Anna was a well known celebrity when she came to Upper Canada in December of 1836. Robert had been in the colony since 1833 serving as Attorney General. Mutual need brought the couple together again between 1836 and 1837. Robert needed the social support of his wife to obtain a government appointment. For her part, Anna sought Robert's assurance that he would not attempt to claim her earnings as his own - as British marriage and property laws allowed.

Anna resided with Robert until the following spring. Always an enthusiastic traveller, in June 1837 Anna set out on a tour of the southwestern region of the province. Anna's route took her to Niagara, Hamilton, London, Port Talbot, and finally to Detroit. From there she travelled by steamer to Michilimackinac (Mackinac Island, Michigan), by open boat to Sault Ste. Marie (Ontario), and then home via Lake Huron and Manitoulin Island. When she returned to Toronto in mid-August she was celebrated as a great adventuress.

After reaching a formal separation agreement with Robert she left Upper Canada - and her marriage - in September of 1837. The following year, Anna published an account of her remarkable Upper Canadian journey in London. Entitled *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*, it documents her winter in Toronto and her summer travels.

After she returned to England Anna wrote four more books, including her critically acclaimed *Sacred and Legendary Art* (1848). Anna died in London on 17 March 1860.

I hardly know how to convey to you an idea of the difference between the two shores; it will appear to you as incredible as it is to me incomprehensible. Our shore is said to be the more fertile, and has been the longer settled. But to float between them (as I did today...), to behold to one side a city, with its towers and spires and animated population, with villas and handsome houses stretching along the shore, and a hundred vessels or more, gigantic steamers, brigs, schooners, crowding the port, loading and unloading; all the bustle, in short of prosperity and commerce;--and on the other side, a little straggling hamlet, one schooner, one little wretched steamboat, some windmills, a Catholic chapel or two, a supine ignorant peasantry, all the symptoms of apathy, indolence, mistrust, hopelessness?--can I, can anyone, help wondering at the difference and asking whence it comes?

Anne Jameson, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (London, 1838; repr. Toronto, 1943), pp. 144-45

I remember particularly one of these clearings, which looked more desolate than the rest; there was an unfinished log house, only half roofed-in and habitable, and this presented some attempt at taste, having a small rustic porch or portico, and the windows on either side framed. No ground was fenced in, and the newly-felled timber lay piled in heaps ready to burn; around lay the forest, its shadow darkening, deepening as the day declined.

But what riveted my attention was the light figure of a female, arrayed in a silk gown and a handsome shawl, who was pacing up and down in front of the house, with a slow step and pensive air. She had an infant lying on her arm, and in the other hand she waved a green bough, to keep off the mosquitoes. I wished to stop--to speak, though at the hazard of appearing impertinent; but my driver represented so strongly the danger of being benighted within the verge of the forest, that I reluctantly suffered him to proceed,

"An oft look'd back upon that vision fair,
And wondering ask'd, whence and how it came there?"

Anne Jameson, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (London, 1838; repr. Toronto, 1943), p. 128

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EVERY WOMAN HAS A PAST MAKING THE INVISIBLE WOMAN VISIBLE

Historians of women have learned to be as thrifty with the past as the women who pieced together beautiful patchwork quilts from the materials at hand. Old sources have been re-read and new ones uncovered to help piece together the lives of previously unknown or little known women.

The collections of local history museums can tell us much about the material conditions of many women's lives. Their collections often include the tools of work's work, of leisure, and other items from everyday life that were created or used by women. These kinds of objects can reveal a dimension of women's experience that is often absent from textual sources.

But artifacts do not speak for themselves. Each must be situated in its historical context. If it is a tool, for example, we must ask who used it? And what did its owner make with it?

By asking such questions, the collections of history museums like this one can be used to uncover women's pasts. Objects and artifacts can help us make the invisible woman visible.